

Browndale/Haliburton

John Brown was an American-born social worker who became famous in Ontario in the 1950's and early 1960's for his revolutionary approach to the care of children suffering from mental health issues at Warrendale in Toronto. He bought not only Arthur Barry's farm in the late 1960's, but also that of Arthur's brother Irie Barry (now the land of Dunloe Farms), and many of the surrounding farms and homesteads including the 1200 acres around Growler Lake. Brown's innovative – and sometimes contentious at the time – approach for the care of children who had serious mental health problems focused on housing the children in residential centres with family-like environments rather than in hospital wards.

Browndale/Haliburton (other Browndale programs existed in other parts of Canada, the USA, Holland and France) itself was not a camp, but a number of group homes located at eight farmhouses in Haliburton County, two of which were those that he had bought from Art and Irie Barry. The children, mostly boys between the ages of seven and eighteen and Crown Wards, were often from troubled or disturbed families. Most had suffered some form of abuse. The Browndale philosophy was to offer a therapeutic re-parenting experience in loving, supportive and nurturing environments where life was consistent and predictable. Each house had staff and was set up like a family with supervisors overseeing two or three houses.

From September to June those children who could attend school on Eagle Lake and they were often taken to town in large vans for clothes, medical appointments and grocery shopping. During the summer months the children camped outdoors at rudimentary campsites with little protection from the elements or insects near Growler Lake. While no camp facilities were erected on Growler Lake property, the counselors came to appreciate the lake for its tranquility.

According to Sharon Bacon, who along with her husband Ron, worked at Browndale in the 1970's, there was only one permanent building at the campground, a laundry, and this building still exists as a private home off Binscarth Trail. There was also a nurse's station and the camp's main office located on Marigold Road. While the children had access to water from The Redstone River, the counselors knew about the beauty of nearby Growler Lake and sometimes went there to camp when they themselves needed respite. Sharon Bacon also recalls that on occasion the counselors would take along one of the children on such camping excursions to Growler as a 'special reward.' They would camp on and

near what is now Parcel #26 owned by the Leis family who have found remnants of these excursions to Growler in the form of a partially buried wooden box containing dishes and in the remains of an old dock left on the property.

Although John Brown was eventually convicted of fraud for the misuse of government funds leading to his bankruptcy in the late 1980's, his legacy lives on in the realm of children's mental health and social work. Having won a seat in the Ontario Legislature as a member of the NDP in 1967, Brown was an Opposition member during the PC government of Premier Bill Davis and upon his death in 2004, the Ontario Legislature devoted time to acknowledge his contributions to increasing awareness of children's mental health needs. While Browndale/Haliburton received mixed responses from the community during their time, the pristine beauty of Growler Lake was universally acknowledged as a calming balm for all involved.

Some logging continued on Growler Lake into the late 1980's, and on some parcels, such as Parcel #23, there is evidence of logging as late as the 1990's. In 2003 Windy Ridge began developing the lands around Growler Lake for Halliburton's growing cottage population. Within a decade nearly all the parcels on the lake were sold and by the time of this writing in 2015 many families enjoy the natural beauty of the little lake that could, and does, refresh, renew and respond to those who appreciate her.

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www.growlerlake.ca



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